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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000236

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR A A/S CARTER, AF/SPG, IO
NSC FOR HUDSON
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPKO](#) [UN](#) [AU](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: GOS REFUSES TO ISSUE VISAS FOR U.S. MILITARY
OFFICERS ASSIGNED TO UNAMID

REF: KHARTOUM 225

Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Following almost a year of agonizing lack of clarity during which the GOS first delayed, then verbally approved, and then once again delayed the issuance of visas for the U.S. military staff officers assigned to UNAMID, just days before the arrival of two of the officers, MFA U/S Mutriff Siddiq finally stated clearly and definitively on February 22 that the GOS will not approve the visas for the U.S. military officers. Siddiq acknowledged to CDA Fernandez that UN/DFS Susana Malcorra raised the issue during the February 18 "tri-partite" (UN-AU-GOS) meetings in Khartoum and pressed the GOS saying that the UN "was embarrassed by the issue." Siddiq said he told Malcorra that the GOS will not approve the visas for officers from the U.S. and some other countries (which he did not name, but we expect could be France and the UK based on Our common position with regard to the ICC) for two reasons. First, Siddiq said that the officers are too senior for the jobs they will fill. "A lieutenant colonel from the U.S. is equivalent to a general from an African country," stated Siddiq, and Therefore the officers would be "more qualified leading than the African officers." Second, Siddiq said a determination could be made later to expel the U.S. officers because of the ICC, and preventing the officers from entering Sudan now is preferable to removing them later when the issue will get more attention and incite greater anger.

¶2. (C) Siddiq urged that the U.S. not look at the issue in isolation but rather in the context of the total volume of visas that Sudan has approved for the U.S. over the last year, as well as in the context of Sudan allowing U.S. military planes to fly into Darfur to deploy the Rwandan battalions and approving the U.S. State Department-funded contract for airlift of UNAMID equipment into Darfur. He noted that "we have agreed to a lot already and the issue of these five officers should not be overplayed."

¶3. (C) CDA also raised the issue of the Humanitarian Affairs Commission's (HAC) seizure of US-funded assets provided to implementing partners PADCO and IRC in South Darfur. act and that while the U.S. had attempted to handle the issue professionally and diplomatically by requesting a meeting with HAC Commissioners Hassabo Abderahman to resolve the situation, the Sudanese response was to escalate the situation, expel the director of the project, and abruptly seize the assets. Fernandez noted that the steps made a mockery of a recent letter from President Bashir to President Obama urging better relations between the two countries. Siddiq promised to speak with Hassabo Abderahman and State Minister of Humanitarian Affairs

Ahmed Harun, but did not promise any particular outcome.

¶4. (C) CDA noted some alarming comments in the Sudanese Arabic press on February 21 by NISS chief Salah Ghosh who said that the Sudanese Government "were Islamic extremists who then became moderate and civilized, believing in peace and life for everyone. However, we can revert back to how we were if necessary. There is nothing easier than that." Ghosh was referring to pressure that may be placed on the regime because of an ICC arrest warrant of President Bashir. CDA Fernandez noted past Sudanese assurances that the Government will abide by its diplomatic obligations under the Vienna Convention and asked for clarification of Ghosh's comments. Siddiq said that everyone in the regime agrees that Sudan will abide by its international commitments to protect embassies, including Ghosh, "that is not the view of individuals but of the State itself and we will continue to make that clear to everyone."

¶5. (C) Finally, CDA raised the issue of visas for visitors from the U.S. Marine Corps in order to plan for the deployment of a Marine Security Guard detachment at the New Embassy Complex (NEC) later this year. CDA explained that this was a standard procedural visit that is required for the deployment of Marines to any new embassy. An MSG had been present in Sudan until 1996 when the Embassy was shut down. Siddiq promised to raise the issue with NISS Chief Salah Ghosh and Minister of Defense Abdel Rahman Hussein, and offered that his own personal advice would be for them to approve the visit, but did not say definitively whether the visas would be approved at this time.

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¶6. (C) Comment: As reported in reftel, our analysis continues to be that the regime is looking for ways to show that in the absence of engagement on the bilateral relationship, the regime can make it difficult for the U.S. in some fields to achieve all of its objectives in Sudan. The regime will continue to choose areas of cooperation and of obstruction and is betting that these two issues, the denial of visas for U.S. military officers assigned to UNAMID, and the confiscation of equipment from a US-funded partner (per the actual terms of their operating agreements with the GOS - which USAID and other donors do not accept), are not flagrant enough to provoke retaliation from the U.S. and might encourage the U.S. to engage more deeply with the regime. As with all other areas of overlap with the Americans, the Khartoum regime always signals the possibility of deeper engagement or increased obstructiveness - its acceptance or denial of any initiative is always conditional. The regime is eager for the U.S. to engage in a negotiation on CPA implementation and the peace process in Darfur linked to improvements in the U.S.-Sudan bilateral relationship including removal of Sudan from the State Sponsors of Terrorism List and lifting of U.S. economic sanctions currently imposed on Sudan. It is as pragmatic as it is brutal and always looking to deal.

¶7. (C) Comment Cont.: Having made the decision not to allow U.S. officers to deploy to UNAMID, it is highly unlikely that the GOS will reverse course on this decision, unless it is specifically linked to a comprehensive negotiation on improvement in bilateral relations. Moreover, we will likely never see anything in writing about this decision. Siddiq's comment that a refusal of the visas is preferable to an expulsion can be read in several ways: that we should count ourselves lucky that a visa refusal is the only action taken against us as a reaction to the ICC, or that it is likely that there will be heightened scrutiny and targeted expulsions from UNAMID or other agencies operating in Darfur following the announcement of an arrest warrant for President Bashir. The regime has threatened to expel anyone suspected of providing information to the ICC so we may see a targeted number of expulsions following an announcement from the ICC while the overall status quo is maintained.

